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U.S. won't bow to Islamic Jihad threats

By Mary Belcher
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Reagan administration officials said yesterday they would not be "intimidated" by the threats of Islamic Jihad to harm six abducted Westerners.

The terrorist group warned that the kidnap victims would suffer unless convicted Moslem terrorists are freed from prison.

At the same time, U.S. officials said, the release of Americans abducted in Beirut is a matter of the "highest priority" to the administration.

Meanwhile, Aidan Walsh, 49, Irish deputy director of the U.N. Relief and Works Agency, was freed unharmed last night, 36 hours after eight gunmen kidnapped him in Moslem west Beirut, Irish Ambassador Robert McDonagh announced at the United Nations in New York.

An Irish source in Beirut said, "He's physically all right, but upset by his ordeal."

Jihad terrorists again sent pictures of four abducted Americans and two French diplomats to newspapers in Beirut yesterday, with a warning that their punishment would be "a horrible disaster" if Jihad demands were not met.

The terrorist organization demanded the release of Moslem terrorists jailed in Kuwait for bombings of French and U.S. targets in 1983.

Administration officials responded yesterday to the ultimatum by stating they do not negotiate with terrorists.

"We will not allow ourselves to be intimidated by terrorist threats or permit such threats to compromise our fundamental policies and values," said White House spokesman Larry Speakes.

However, Mr. Speakes added, "We are determined to obtain the release of the kidnapped Americans. This is an issue of highest priority for the administration."

The Americans, whose photos were sent to the respected Beirut newspaper An Nahar, are political officer William Buckley; the Rev. Lawrence Jenco, head of Catholic Relief Services in Beirut; the Rev. Benjamin Weir, a Presbyterian minister, and Associated Press bureau chief

in Beirut Terry Anderson. The French diplomats whose photos were published were Marcel Fontaine and Marcel Carton.

The administration has come under attack for failing to win the release of the kidnapped Americans who were abducted in Beirut between March 1984 and March 1985.

Mr. Speakes defended the administration's efforts to free the kidnap victims, but he would not comment on what is being done.

"We believe we are presently following the best-designed course to obtain this result in a quiet, non-public manner," he said.

Meanwhile, the furor continued over allegations that a CIA-trained group was linked to a March 8 bomb blast that killed more than 80 people. Nabih Berri, justice minister and a Shi'ite Moslem who heads the Shi'ite Amal militia, yesterday ordered an investigation of the incident.

Islamic Jihad's threat was delivered initially Wednesday night to the west Beirut newspaper An Nahar. The notes also contained appeals to U.S. civil-rights activist Jesse Jackson.

"Their release is up to your action to persuade your governments to pressure them to ask their agents in Kuwait to release all our brothers who are jailed there," said a typewritten statement to the men's relatives. "Our brothers" apparently was a reference to three Lebanese Shi'ites and seven Iraqis jailed in Kuwait for a series of bombings on Dec. 12, 1983.

"For the last time, we warn you . . . the punishment will be a horrible disaster in case you do not act seriously in this

respect and pressure your governments to intervene and set [our brothers] free," the statement said.

No mention was made in the note to the newspaper of a fifth American missing in Lebanon, Peter Kilburn, a 60-year-old librarian at the American University of Beirut.

Mr. Walsh was grabbed in broad daylight near his apartment on a busy road after his station wagon was sandwiched between the two cars of his assailants.

His Palestinian driver, who was allowed to go free, said Mr. Walsh did not resist but was taken at gunpoint into one of the cars, which then disappeared into traffic.

"I do not think his nationality has anything to do with it," said an Irish diplomat. "We have a very positive relationship in Lebanon, and there has never been an Irishman taken here before."

One theory for the abduction is that the kidnappers were acting out of criminal rather than political motives. Mr. Walsh is known as a "troubleshooter" brought into Lebanon last September to try to clear up reports of financial irregularities and corruption inside the agency.

The agency administers aid and relief services to Lebanon's 350,000 Palestinian refugees, but funds and aid are thought to have been misappropriated.